

Regarding the 2002 Biennial Regulatory Review of the Commission's Broadcast Ownership Rules and Other Rules Adopted Pursuant to the Federal Telecommunications Act of 1996 (Sec. 202), Notice of Proposed Rulemaking Docket #02-277

To: The Secretary, FCC Commissioners, and Chief, Media Bureau:

On behalf of Family Farm Defenders, I am contacting you in reference to Docket No. 02-277, the biennial review of the FCC's broadcast media ownership rules. Our organization represents family farmers across the U.S., and we are strongly opposed to any further consolidation and homogenization of the mass media in this country. The FCC's mandate is to serve the public interest - not corporate profit - and therefore it should retain significant oversight and continue to restrict market control in the broadcast industry.

Given that less than two million family farmers now remain in the U.S., we find it increasingly difficult to have our voice heard in a mass media that is often managed from distant urban centers and underwritten by powerful corporations with interests quite contrary to our own. Freedom of discourse and open debate on critical issues is compromised when a small elite comes to claim exclusive control over our public airwaves. This is especially true in remote rural areas where news and opinion is now held hostage by a few private firms. In the worst case scenario, there now exists nothing but a stifling broadcast monopoly.

Absentee ownership of broadcast media also poses a serious public safety risk as residents of Minot, ND rudely discovered back on Jan. 18th, 2002. As you may know, that was the evening that a train containing hundreds of thousands of gallons of ammonia derailed, releasing a poisonous white cloud. Officials attempted to alert the population over radio - but because six out of the seven Minot stations are now owned by Clear Channel, there was no response for hours. Seeking greater profit, Clear Channel had eliminated much of its workforce and forsaken local news coverage, running instead canned programming on auto pilot from thousands of miles away. For lack of adequate warning, 300 people were hospitalized and numerous livestock killed.

The FCC should uphold its public mandate by maintaining existing restrictions on broadcast ownership. Family Farm Defenders would also request that the FCC solicit public comment on this issue beyond the current deadline since so many people - particularly isolated rural residents - stand to be affected by this decision. An accessible, diverse, and vibrant communication infrastructure is essential for any democracy and the outcome of this debate should not be determined by the bottomline of corporations.

Sincerely,

John E. Peck
Executive Director
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